

Hacking, Computing Expertise, and Difference – Version 20211216

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Abstract

Hackers are variously and sometimes contradictorily seen as geeks, experts, amateurs, rule breakers, and even forces of sociopolitical resistance. Scholarly explorations of the hacker ethos, from hack-driven leakers and journalists to young people who organize hackathons and hacker schools, indicate that hackers vary widely in terms of identities, practices, motivations, and phases over time. Thus, the definitions of who a hacker is and what a hack constitutes vary by who tells the origin story—and with significant consequences for justice.

This review presents the phenomenon of hacking and the hackathon as well as issues of access and equity in how racial, gendered, class-based, or other social groups are able to access hacking and are treated within hacking spaces. It points out x y z important conclusions/consequences. It examines how emerging forms of hacking operate under multiple, often contradictory logics, resulting in more or less equitable technological structures and interactions, which may well provide opportunities for liberation and inclusion but also succumb to market forces and profit pressures that lead to exclusion and inequality. It shows how visibility and shifting norms of who gets to break rules are closely interconnected in the construction of hacking culture. Understanding how some forms of hacking have been valued and others devalued—even criminalized—is central to understanding the limits and potential of hacking as a practice and an identity. Finally, the review addresses critiques from the point of view of the Global South, conceptualized as voices that have been excluded from technology and hacking culture, and insists that attention be paid to forces that disempower struggles for justice against capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial exploitation. This approach indicates x, y, z important points. The review ends by highlighting research projects that demonstrate how cultures of computing can be connected to activist legacies to advance projects in the name of hacking in/from the South.